

RESTORING A

CGC PENOBSCOT BAY'S CREW LENDS A

Lighthouses standing today serve to remind us of a by-gone era, of the mariner's constant battle with the elements and the sea. Weathering storm after storm, gale after gale, they stand as testimony to man's ability to build an enduring and powerful lifesaving monument.

Since the establishment of the United States Lighthouse Service in 1789, lighthouses have been a colorful part of the Coast Guard's history. Lighthouses such as Unimak Island, Alaska, St. George Reef, Calif., Cape Florida, Fla., and Portland Head Lighthouse, Maine, are just some of the many that serve as reminders of the United States' maritime development.

Today the Coast Guard manages 475 active lighthouses, of which only Boston Light remains manned.

The crew of the *CGC Penobscot Bay* — a 140-foot ice-breaking tug in Governor's Island, N.Y. — recently joined the effort to save one more of these maritime treasures.

Learning a little history about an old friend

Although restoration work can be a backbreaking task, the project gave the tug's crew the opportunity to learn a little something about their own history while laboring over this old friend.

Esopus Meadows Light, located in the North (Hudson) River, was originally constructed in 1837 and showed its light — produced by five lamps with 14-inch reflectors — for the first time in 1839. The light was then only nine feet above the bottom of the river and was built on a pier measuring 41 feet by 50 feet. There was an angular extension on the north side that served as an icebreaker for the station. However no such protection from ice was made for the southern end of the pier where storms often pushed up ice floes.

These often fierce North-east winters took their toll on the structure in only



QM1 Jon R. Frederick scrapes paint from the wood-sided Esopus Meadow Lighthouse during recent renovations.

30 years. By 1867 the light station was described as being in a ruinous condition. Several years later, work began on the facility that still stands today.

Besides braving harsh climate conditions, Esopus Meadows Light is unique in several ways.

Unlike the many other lighthouses on the Hudson, Esopus Meadows Light is accessible only by boat.

It is also the only Hudson River lighthouse to have been built with a wood frame and sheathed with clapboard. Standing 53 feet above the river, the dioptric, fifth-order Fresnel lens provided a 270-degree arc of light that could be seen in clear weather for 12 nautical miles.

Although its construction and location may make it unique, Esopus Meadows Light was like many stations of its time — it saw many changes from its days in the Lighthouse Service through its transition to the Coast Guard.

The station was manned by family keepers until the Coast Guard acquired the Lighthouse Service in 1939. Soon thereafter Coast Guard personnel manned the light through 1965 when the light was automated from shore. In 1974, the light was extinguished and today

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BY-GONE ERA

HAND IN RENOVATING A MARITIME TREASURE

Middle Hudson Light #11 provides the only warning to river travelers of the flats to the west.

Empty since 1965, the once majestic lighthouse returned to a ruinous state. And, once again, an effort is being made to restore the lighthouse to its original beauty.

Besides the Coast Guard's long-standing ties with lighthouses, there was another reason the *Penobscot Bay's* crew wanted to take part in the restoration — professional development.

According to BMC Ray Reiter, the idea for the crew of the *Penobscot Bay* to work on Esopus Meadows Light spawned from a desire to do some aids-to-navigation-related work in the spring.

CG lends a helping hand

“We were steaming past Middle Hudson Light one day,” said Reiter, “and I looked up and said, ‘well captain, why don’t we go ahead and do some work on that lighthouse?’”

Reiter said he later took the cutter’s small boat to

the lighthouse and got the name of the architect in charge of the lighthouse restoration.

From there Rieter said it was a matter of deciding what work the crew could get done and what materials were needed.

For three days the crew chipped and scraped paint, hauled away trash, built a small dock, painted and, through the use of a cleverly constructed hoist, raised the base of a boom — weighing about 1,200 pounds — from the bric-a-brac surrounding the lighthouse. This boom was used by the lighthouse keepers to lower small boats and bring supplies up to the lighthouse.

Small part in a big project

The *Penobscot Bay's* involvement in the restoration of Esopus Meadows Light was part of an even larger project. The Save the Esopus Lighthouse Commission was formed in the spring of 1990 in an effort to renovate one of the country’s lighthouse legacies for future generations.

“The work the crew of the *Penobscot Bay* accomplished is nothing short of a minor miracle,” said Arline Fitzpatrick, director of the commission.

“The work they completed will help bring more volunteers and create interest in the project because people will be able to see an improvement in the appearance on the outside of the lighthouse,” Fitzpatrick said.

The commission has raised funds to help pay for the project. It also encourages local volunteers, in an effort to foster a bond between the community and its rich historical maritime legacy.

Fitzpatrick said the restoration of the lighthouse should be completed in 1995 if the project stays on schedule.

Now, thanks to help from the crew of the *Penobscot Bay*, one more lighthouse will continue to stand the test of time, reminding river travelers of more than the flats to the west. •

— PA2 C.T. O’Neil,
1st Dist. South

build an enduring and powerful lifesaving monument. Now, thanks to help from the crew of the CGC Penobscot Bay, one more lighthouse will still stand, reminding river travelers of more than the flats to the west.



SA Dave G. Bartoshek hangs out in the boatswain’s chair to scrape paint from the side of the lighthouse.

Photos by PA3 C.T. O’Neil